

Learning Organizations

HCI Accelerators

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Better preparing the acquisition workforce for the challenges ahead is a strategic imperative across the community. Personnel changeover and inexperienced new hires are placing increased demand on organizations. Without proper planning, focus on, and attention to this issue, maintaining our edge in weapon systems, services, and other acquisition becomes problematic.

To maintain our competitive warfighting advantage, the Department of Defense has initiated the *Strategic Human Capital Plan Update* (April, 2010) to accelerate and sustain the capability of the acquisition workforce and ultimately protect our national security interests.

Importance of a Human Capital Initiatives Program

With the increasing departure from the workforce of the Baby-Boomer generation, DoD is facing the loss of critical acquisition experience that has taken many years to grow. This places heavier importance on human capital initiatives to fill a near-term gap while adequately preparing an acquisition culture that is changing as well. In the last few years, recognizing noticeable experience shortfalls within the ranks of DoD's acquisition arm, the U.S. Congress has elevated the importance of workforce capability. On April 6, 2009, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced his plans to grow the defense acquisition workforce by 20,000 through fiscal year 2015.

But has DoD adequately responded to the challenge and instituted effective measures, or is it too early to tell? If DoD has placed solutions into motion, what is the measure of success? Will these programs boost the human skills needed to assure future program development successes? Whatever the answers, leadership in both government and industry must stay closely connected to a workforce solution. Without their support, experience gains may be lost. Industry has already found middle managers to be the critical links influencing per-

formance and growing experience within the overall workforce context. Invariably, middle managers are part of the solution to the success of a company's goods and services. Leadership at all levels is, however, ultimately the most crucial.

HCI and its Application to the Defense Acquisition Workforce

Several examples can be cited where organizations have implemented workforce initiatives that are producing real dividends. They have many of the same common successful practices. Some include strong partnerships between senior leaders and middle managers; some recognize that experience should be a daily consumable; and some seek external support in the form of training partnerships to augment their own internal training programs. And when they seek external training, they tend to tap training organizations with the knowledge and experience to help them reassess their key processes and essential competencies to ensure better alignment with their organization's overall strategic goals. More and more, however, they also find that training is just one variable inside the workforce equation. How organizations view learning tends to become a much more predominant factor and can produce visible dividends. In essence, they act something like learning organizations and help leaders become more savvy consumers of learning; strengthen the connection between manager and improved performance, since research has confirmed that managers are the number one reason whether or not learners apply what they learn; and bring leadership into the training prescription to emphasize its importance.



WOW!

For the annual fee of only **\$25**, or the special rate (*limited time offer*) of \$50 for a 3-year membership, please consider joining the **Defense Acquisition University Alumni Association**.

What does the alumni association do?

The association presents the annual DAU Acquisition Symposium on current defense/military service systems acquisition policies, procedures and issues where you can earn continuous learning points by attending.

This year's symposium will be held at the **DAU Fort Belvoir campus on April 12, 2011**...to register for the symposium go to <http://www.dauaa.org/Symposium2011/Index.htm>

Other Alumni Association membership activities/benefits on behalf of the Department of Defense and defense industry workforce include:

- Support of an annual Research Paper (Hirsch Prize) Competition
- Access to hot topic forums on key defense acquisition issues
- Access to networking events at all five DAU regional campuses
- Quarterly Association Newsletter
- Receptions for DAU courses at all DAU campuses
- Professional relationships with other premier associations (Program Management Institute; Reliability, Maintainability, and Supportability Partnership; National Defense Industrial Association; Aerospace Industries Association; National Contract Management Association)
- Sponsorship of numerous other activities related to defense acquisition

More information on the Alumni Association and its activities is posted to the DAUAA website at

<http://www.dauaa.org/>

Not surprisingly, the common thread found throughout successful organizations in the government and industry is the development of a learning culture that harbors leadership involvement, creates opportunities for mentoring, leverages expertise across the enterprise, encourages interaction and experimentation at all levels, and creates an environment conducive to learning.

Learning Organizations—Examples

The following learning organizations are representative of those organizations that have effectively applied a number of learning techniques with successful outcomes.

Space and Missile Systems Center (SMC) Los Angeles, Calif.

SMC implemented a customized version of ACQ 101 for SMC entry-level personnel. Initial feedback indicated the need for experience accelerators for entry-level personnel outside the standard Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) certification path. Over 150 students have participated.

One student said, "Instructor summaries and exercises made the information more useful and definitely more applicable. I'll be leaving the course with information that will help me understand my new job."

Students say the largest impact will be enhanced effectiveness, productivity, and quality on the job. SMC also conducted an intensive 2½-day "Guardian Challenge"—an event geared to test inherent leadership and functional expertise of SMC personnel, specifically in the acquisition community. The space acquisition community competition demonstrated the strength of various DAWIA certification levels. The Defense Acquisition University and SMC joined forces to produce a real-world challenge facing the space community today: how to best satisfy a shortage in satellite communications bandwidth in a wartime theater of operations. Many junior personnel had an opportunity to demonstrate their collective mettle and test-drive their acquisition skills across the entire acquisition integrated framework, within their own product line, at their own base, and alongside their own colleagues. [Editor's note: *The Guardian Challenge* was the subject of an article in the September–October 2010 issue of *Defense AT&L*.]

Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command (SPAWAR) San Diego, Calif.

HCI efforts at SPAWAR focused on enhancing business processes, workload assignment balance, and benefits/opportunities for their acquisition and *program management leadership* personnel. SPAWAR also took an intensive look at program performance within their enterprise. This intensive review resulted in a SPAWAR Competency Development Model

(CDM) for the Program and Project Management Competency, which defines the assignments/experience as well as the knowledge, skills, and abilities for the personnel aligned to the CDM. The CDM provides objective metrics through four stages (entry, intermediate, advanced, and expert) to assess individual capability and to provide a recommended path for growing that capability. This particular action is expected to provide a clear, objective path toward expert-level program management capability and improved performance throughout an individual's career.

Joint Tactical Radio System (JTRS) Program Office, San Diego, Calif.

JTRS conducted frequent workshops that helped both new and seasoned employees understand the structure of the Joint Program Executive Office as well as the interdependences that exist among five Acquisition Category 1D program offices. Topics covered in the workshop included organizational functions, mission, goals, and how the workers actually fit into the overall program. These workshops benefited the participants by creating personnel synergy and enduring networks. Participants noted the training broadened their understanding of a huge range of functions within JTRS and represents, in the words of one, "a must-attend for all new JTRS employees and [should be] strongly advertised to DoD, governance, and congressional stakeholders." Additionally, the JTRS program hired two naval acquisition associates through the Naval Development Program in Mechanicsburg, Pa. This program was established to provide qualified and talented entry-level college graduates with the opportunity for development and career-broadening assignments.

Program Executive Office for Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence (PEO C4I), San Diego, Calif.

PEO C4I standardized key processes and used hiring authorities to attract qualified mid-level personnel rapidly. To support the new hires, PEO C4I conducted intensive 4-day programmatic workshops that accelerated the learning experience. Over 500 personnel have attended. This workshop represented a cross-cutting opportunity to share experiences inherent in the PEO C4I organization. PEO C4I also initiated a career progression model that clearly defined entry-, inter-

mediate-, advanced-, and expert-level positions in accordance with DAWIA-defined guidelines.

Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) Los Angeles, Calif.

DCMA's keystone program, a selective 3-year management training program, provides on-the-job training and leads to career-building opportunities in business, engineering, information technology, quality assurance, personnel management, and other fields throughout the agency. Jennifer Pueblo, who has been with the program for 2 years, said she has learned so much from the keystone program and that it has placed her years ahead of her college peers.

Marine Corps Tactical Systems Support Activity (MCTSSA)

MCTSSA focused on recognizing and celebrating the acquisition excellence of the workforce. In a recent Acquisition Excellence Day, the theme "Changing Times...Creative Minds: A Strategic Focus on Innovation and Change" rang clear as personnel were acknowledged for their contributions. Events such as this reinforce the value organizations place on people, and validate the premise that an encouraged and motivated workforce tends to have a larger impact on organizational goals.

Defense Acquisition University

DAU provided greater access to key learning assets, including mobile learning, gaming, and simulation (e.g., cohort training) that engaged the learner through virtual technology methods that were immediately accessible 24/7 and were appealing to all learning levels. As a learning organization, DAU established five strategic goals uniquely designed to meet a wide range of AT&L workforce learning needs ranging from targeted training to focused consulting, in addition to the core DAWIA training it already provided.

Benefits of Learning Organizations

With active HCI programs that embrace a learning organization model, acquisition organizations in particular seem to strengthen their human capital talent and increase the likelihood of successful outcomes, even though the baby boomers, who have served as the experience foundation, will be making a dramatic exit from the workforce. Organizations that have instituted chief learning officers known to champion their respective learning organizations are demonstrating how learning partnerships can cultivate talent more quickly at the ground level and respond more quickly to cultural needs that sometimes get short circuited. In the acquisition business, bridging experience gaps will always be paramount. Building flexible learning maps becomes a key enabler, since they are tightly aligned with strategic goals and help lead to purposeful outcomes. There are other considerations to keep in mind.

Accelerated Learning: View training as fundamentally interactive and experiential. Work closely with organizations and their

interns to help build relevant and timely training programs. These programs should advance supervisors' and employees' vitally important skillsets that fill the gaps in the near- and far-term.

Environmental Acclimation: With new jobs emerging as the baby boomers exit the workforce, new employees should understand the history and future of the programs they support. Make the most out of teaching moments that are unplanned. What opportunities exist in the short run that might be overlooked by not taking a risk on newly acquired talent and allowing them to learn in any scenario? Experiences can be gained by guided practice in spite of mistakes that may occur. Let practice shape the necessary learning pathway.

Early Professional Development: Short-term results are modest, but over longer periods, investing early and with a variety of professional development and training initiatives will assure the workforce is thoughtfully aligned with key organizational functions.

Training Rhythm: Keeping up with currency in a field of expertise can seem insurmountable, given the limited time available to attend events like trade seminars, conferences, symposia, and formal training. When it comes to experience gains, however, nothing beats exposure and practice often found at these events. There is a direct and favorable relationship between practice and success. The nominal investment is well justified, and over time it keeps the workforce motivated about learning and focused on certain changes that keep them current and engaged for the long haul.

Not surprisingly, the common thread found throughout successful organizations in the government and industry is the development of a learning culture that harbors leadership involvement, creates opportunities for mentoring, leverages expertise across the enterprise, encourages interaction and experimentation at all levels, and creates an environment conducive to learning. Acquisition organizations have found rewards with these same elements. To grow a capable and skilled workforce that is second to none, organizations must recognize the continuing importance of learning programs that support the changing and dynamic nature of both the workforce and acquisition demands. Many acquisition organizations in the Department of Defense are already reaping the benefits on the convergence between the two. It is safe to say that greater concentration on and commitment to human capital initiatives, especially in the form of learning organizations, will help organizations that produce the goods and provide the services that maintain their competitive advantage so U.S. warfighters can do the same.

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